

OLC 72-0669
2 June 1972

MEMORANDUM FOR THE RECORD

SUBJECT: Testimony by Alfred W. McCoy on the Heroin Traffic in Southeast Asia before the Foreign Operations Subcommittee of the Senate Appropriations Committee on 2 June 1972

1. In testimony before the Foreign Operations Subcommittee of the Senate Appropriations Committee, Alfred W. McCoy, a student in Southeast Asian history at Yale University, made serious charges to the effect that U. S. officials have been implicated in the drug traffic in Southeast Asia. He stated that most of the opium traffic in northeastern Laos is controlled by Vang Pao, who commands the CIA mercenary army. He said that CIA has provided substantial military support to "right-wing rebels, and tribal warlords who are actively engaged in the narcotics traffic." He claimed that "In northern Laos, Air America aircraft and helicopters chartered by the U. S. Central Intelligence Agency and USAID have been transporting opium harvested by the agency's tribal mercenaries."

2. Following McCoy's testimony Senator Proxmire, Chairman of the Subcommittee, stated that McCoy's charges were both serious and disturbing and asked him to support the various allegations which he had made. McCoy said he would provide this information for the record and added that his allegations are documented in his book "The Politics of Heroin in Southeast Asia" which is scheduled for publication this July. Senator McGee also took McCoy to task and said that the generalizations made in his testimony sharply contradicted information which was available to the Congress from other sources. He noted that everyone recognized that illicit opium traffic in Southeast Asia was a serious problem that changes have been made in the U. S. approach to the situation and added that the situation was not as bleak as McCoy suggested. Senator McGee also stated that a number of authorities have specifically stated that CIA has played a key role in cracking down on

narcotic traffic. He said that McCoy was giving the impression that CIA was some kind of culprit and characterized McCoy's approach as being similar to the practice of the late Senator Joe McCarthy. He said unless Mr. Helms, the Secretary of Defense and the President are lying to the Congress the situation is far different from that which McCoy described. McGee also said he was aware of the fact that Air America has instituted a hard-hitting program of searching passengers and policing cargos in an effort to eliminate the transportation of illicit drugs on its flights.

3. McCoy said he resented the Senator's implication that he was engaging in McCarthyism and said that obviously Senator McGee's sources of information were high-level officials. He said that the subordinates of these officials, who were the people he had talked with, had indicated to him that the U. S. Government was supporting persons in Southeast Asia who were actually aiding and abetting the heroin traffic.

4. At the conclusion of the hearing Senator Proxmire commented that Secretary Rogers and John Ingersoll, Director of the Bureau of Narcotics and Dangerous Drugs, would be asked to comment on the charges which McCoy has made but he agreed with McCoy that the problem of heroin traffic in the United States also required action of the highest priority including the conduct of the war in Southeast Asia.

5. At an informal press conference following his testimony McCoy repeated many of the charges he had made in his testimony and also made several additional statements including statements that Meo tribesmen, who were engaged in the production of opium, were actually using Air America's planes and helicopters to transport this material out of the Plaine des Jarres. He also made reference to the fact that the U. S. had been supporting cross-border operations by members of the Shan. He said these incursions into Communist China began in the 1950's and were not terminated until late in 1971. When queried by members of the press as to his sources of information McCoy made vague references to interviews with various Meo's and other locals. When asked if he talked to U. S. officials in Southeast Asia, he said he had not done this because he knew what people like [redacted] would say.

6. We have contacted Mr. Rady Johnson, Assistant Secretary of Defense for Congressional Relations, concerning a request by Senator Proxmire that Secretary Laird respond to McCoy's charges when he appears on Monday and we have sent to Johnson a copy of the package which we prepared for Senator McGee.

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[redacted]
Deputy Legislative Counsel

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Distribution:

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